

# The SOLUTION source

Thunder Bay Counselling Centre Newsletter

## For You & Your Family



# Where have all the fathers gone?

### CENTRE HIGHLIGHTS



The Thunder Bay Counselling Centre and Children's Centre Thunder Bay provide walk-in counselling services at the new Walk-in Counselling Clinic.

Call (807) 684-1880 or (807) 343-5000

FAMILY  
SERVICES



EMPLOYEE  
ASSISTANCE  
PROGRAMS

**Employee Assistance Programs (EAP).**  
We offer custom designed counselling solutions for business and employees.  
Contact us today at: 807-684-1880

### INTRODUCTION

Our Spring 2008 newsletter speaks to the challenges involved in maintaining a happy family when one of the partners works out of town. It can be a difficult situation, but it can be managed to the satisfaction of everyone involved.



THUNDER BAY  
**COUNSELLING CENTRE**  
SOLUTIONS THAT CHANGE LIVES



When we think of single-parent families, we usually think in terms of divorced or unmarried sole-custody parents. A new paradigm has been developing, however, owing to the number of people working away from their home-towns.

In Europe, women who are left behind while their husbands work elsewhere are sometimes called “grass widows.” The expression stems from the dried-grass stuffing once used for mattresses and has more to do with a husband’s absence from the marital bed than his participation in the household and child-rearing, but it does effectively capture the feelings of isolation and loneliness that can affect families in this situation.

## Impact on Thunder Bay Families

In Thunder Bay, mill closures have resulted in many displaced workers taking jobs in places like the Lac Des Iles mine site and Fort McMurray, leaving their partners to be “grass widows” for much of the time.

In the absence of one parent, the other tends to shoulder the majority of the family responsibilities. There are many stresses involved in juggling household chores, kids’ transportation, meals, extracurricular activities and often a full-time job. Additionally, children require emotional support to compensate for an absent parent, and the at-home partner must cope with his or her own feelings of isolation and loneliness.

## Coping

Writer Katherine Parkes says in “Living Two Lives” that partners and children are required to cope with the emotional demands of repeated partings and reunions and with disruption to shared family, social and community activities.

Families that seem to manage a partner’s absences the best share some characteristics. They’ve made a mutual commitment to working together to maintain the family. They work at keeping communication open. They respect each other and the different requirements of their roles. They develop systems, planning in advance and organizing schedules to provide structure for their marriage and their children. All of these characteristics seem designed to promote feelings of unity and closeness despite the distances involved.

## Develop Couples’ Strategies

- Make major decisions together.
- Be prepared in advance for unexpected situations and decisions.
- Decide on emergency procedures before the family member goes on the road.
- Fix, or hire someone to fix, problems as they arise. Don’t leave them until the out-of-town partner comes home.
- Obtain powers of attorney for each other’s affairs.
- Go through budget and investment training together.
- Remember that both partners need to prepare mentally and emotionally prior to being together after all those days apart. Plan ahead for the homecoming so that expectations are met. For example, have

enough clothes for two cycles of travel so you won't waste precious time together doing laundry.

- Understand that both of you are contributing to the success of your family. Be openly thankful and accepting of thanks. Neither of you can make it happen without the other one doing their job.
- Respect each other and your roles and challenges.
- Develop a phone-call schedule, and keep in touch three to five times a week. Keep a list of items that need to be discussed.

## Develop Family Strategies

- Develop rituals for leaving and returning home.
- Don't change children's discipline during absences or upon return. Make a special effort to stand together on issues.
- Use a calendar to write daily events to share on the phone and mark days off until the parent will return home.
- Use a video camera or cassette recorder to record all the week's events.
- Post laminated photocopied maps and use markers to track travel reports.
- Keep yourself and the children busy with activities during the other parent's absence.
- When both spouses are at home, family should come first. Make it a point to spend time together.

## Take Advantage of Outside Support

When couples are separated by work and distance, it's important to manage feelings of isolation by developing outside support. Reach out to family,

friends, church and spiritual faith. Don't be afraid to ask for help, especially from those who have been through it.

Among families managing a partner's absence, self-led support groups were found to be very successful. Partners who have successfully adapted to the lifestyle of work-induced separation share strategies they have found successful. The support groups focus on personal growth with a strong educational component for teaching coping skills.

For more information on support groups and counselling, call the Thunder Bay Counselling Centre or visit our website at [www.tbaycounselling.com](http://www.tbaycounselling.com). ■

### Thunder Bay Counselling Centre Services:

Thunder Bay Counselling Centre provides essential counselling and consultation solutions to meet the needs of Thunder Bay businesses, organizations and employees through its Corporate Services division. Our programs and services include:

- Addictions
- Conflict Resolution
- Credit Management
- Employee Assistance Programs (EAP)
- Individual, Couple & Family Counselling
- Organizational Development
- Stress Management
- Training & Consultation
- Trauma Response
- Workshops



## Customize Your EAP!

FAMILY  
SERVICES



EMPLOYEE  
ASSISTANCE  
PROGRAMS

Thunder Bay Counselling Centre is the local provider of Family Services Employee Assistance Programs (FSEAP). The Employee Assistance Program is a custom designed, one-stop counselling, consultation and wellness program for business and employees. We work with employees to resolve personal and work-related problems before they affect their health, family or ability to work. Ask us today about a customized EAP contract.

## Training, Consultation and Workshops

We customize training programs and workshops to suit your specific needs on a variety of topics including;

- Leadership
- Strategic Planning
- Communications
- Managing Change
- Surviving Downsizing
- Crisis Response Planning
- Employee Relations
- Managing Change
- Problem Solving
- Financial Management

Contact us today to discuss your needs and how we can assist you or your organization.

## Relationship Counselling

All relationships experience difficult times - it's how you handle those times that makes the difference between staying together and splitting up. If you want to talk about your relationships past, present or future, how your family is affected by your relationship, how you can improve your relationship, how you can manage a separation constructively, or how you can get over a break up, Thunder Bay Counselling Centre is here to help you.

We support people through all stages of their relationships and you can access our support on your own or with your partner. Our solutions offer advice on issues such as communication, conflict resolution, intimacy issues, positive listening and talking techniques.

## The **SOLUTION** *source* *For You & Your Family*

Edited by Colleen Ginter  
Corporate Services Division

This newsletter is written by the staff of Thunder Bay Counselling Centre. We always welcome all of your comments and suggestions. Articles are to be reprinted only with our permission. Thunder Bay Counselling Centre offers information as suggestions and claims no responsibility for content. For further information, you can contact us at:

544 Winnipeg Avenue  
Thunder Bay, Ontario P7B 3S7  
Email: [corporate@tbaycounselling.com](mailto:corporate@tbaycounselling.com)  
Web Site: [www.tbaycounselling.com](http://www.tbaycounselling.com)

